

Historic, archived document

Do not assume content reflects current scientific knowledge, policies, or practices.

THE GARDEN CALENDAR

A radio discussion by W. R. Beattie, Bureau of Plant Industry, delivered in the Department of Agriculture period of the National Farm and Home Hour, broadcast by a network of 48 associate NBC radio stations,

Thursday, February 8, 1934.

Hello Folks: I've been getting requests from members of the Farm and Home Hour family, asking me to give a few pointers on the care of house plants during the winter. I'll agree that the keeping of plants in the house during the winter does present a lot of problems and that plants must receive the proper care if you're going to keep them looking attractive. It has always struck me as rather odd that a lot of us go on fussing with house plants just for the sake of having something green and living in the home during the winter.

House plants are very much like dogs, cats and other pets in that they require regular attention and respond accordingly. The plants can not ask for a drink of water or for food and yet they require food, water, proper temperature and light and even respond to personal attention. There is mainly a matter of proper soil, temperature, moisture, sunshine and freedom from insect pests and diseases.

Where plants are grown in the garden they have plenty of room to spread their roots in search of moisture and plant nutrients, but when you have a palm or a fern or some other plant growing in a pot or a tub it is restricted in its root spread and this often affects its growth decidedly. For that reason the soil in which you grow your house plants should be especially well prepared.

The trained gardener and the florist lay great stress upon the importance of having the right kind of soil. Two parts of rotted sods, one part of old rotted, dairy barn manure, and one part of sharp sand is a good general-purpose potting soil. For ferns and begonias one part of leaf mold from the woods may be added.

The expert gardeners manage to get a supply of bluegrass sods from some pasture field during the summer and then pile these sods with alternate layers of rotted manure, adding water to moisten the pile. After 3 or 4 weeks they take a sharp spade and chop the manure and sods together then repile and wet down the soil and leave it to rot for about 6 months. When it comes to using the soil they mix a little sand or leaf mold, or both, with this basic soil to adapt it to the kind of plants, they are potting. Before the soil is used it is generally screened through a sieve or screen having about three-fourths inch openings. a little bone meal - about a handful to each bushel of soil is also added.

Where you are potting house plants in ordinary flowerpots, place a few pieces of broken flowerpot or small stones over the drainage hole in the bottom of the pot. In case tin pails or wooden tubs are used for house plants a hole or two should be made in the bottom of each and plenty

(over)

of drainage material spread over the bottom to insure good drainage for the plants. If you have a fern or begonia or some other plant that has become potbound and needs repotting, take it out of the container, remove some of the old soil from about its roots then place a handful or two of soil in the bottom of the new pot, on top of the drainage material, set your plant in place, and fill in around the roots with fresh soil. It is a good idea to firm the soil around the old ball of earth, and a piece of stick or lath is good for tamping the soil around the roots of the plant. When you have the job finished the soil should be at least half an inch or preferably an inch below the top of the pot to make room for adding water. Don't have the soil too dry when you are potting or repotting a plant, and just as soon as the plant is potted, give it a moderate watering. It is also a good plan to keep the plants shaded for a day or so after they are repotted.

Next in importance is to give your plants plenty of sunshine and pure air. The atmosphere of the average living room is too hot and too dry for most house plants. The plants not only suffer from the dry atmosphere but from the fumes that come from gas and oil stoves and even from oil lamps. Seventy degrees is the usual temperature for a living room and this is a little too high for most house plants. A temperature 65 to 68 degrees in daytime and 58 or 60 degrees at night is better.

Where plants are left near windows during cold nights the shades should be drawn to protect them, or, if the weather is very cold the plants should either be removed away from the windows or several newspapers spread between them and the windows.

As a rule house plants need a little watering every day, and they require more water during bright sunny weather than during cloudy weather. The water requirements of house plants will depend very largely upon the atmospheric conditions in the home. This can be corrected to some degree by keeping a kettle of water on the stove to give off moisture and prevent the air from becoming too dry.

We get a great many inquiries regarding the control of insects on house plants. The little plant lice and the mealy bugs are two of the worst offenders, and a bath in fairly strong soapy water about once a month is a very good method of holding these insects under control. Turn the plants on their sides when you give them their bath and don't allow the soapy water to run down into the soil in which the plants are growing. It is a good idea to leave the soapy water on the leaves for an hour or two, then rinse the plants with clean moderately cold water, but don't have it too cold. The addition of a little nicotine sulphate or extract of tobacco to the soapy water will aid in ridding the plants of the little aphids or plant lice.